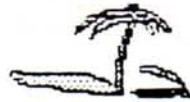# O-ACE'S

OMAHA ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS

Volume 5 Issue 11   November 1987

Wednesday, Nov 11

MONTHLY MEETING
La Vista Recreation Center

7:00 P.M.

There will be NO
Special Interest Group **MEETING**
This Month

Old Business

The October meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by president Jamie Blinn with the first order of business being the upcoming club officer elections.

The club elections will take place in November and all members are welcome to participate by voting and/or running for office.

The offices available and the people nominated are:

President: Peter Killian
Vice Pres/Treas: Deane Bolin
Librarian 8-Bit: Axel Ricker
              ST: Roger Reese
Editor 8-Bit:
              ST: Donna Griggs

Current president Jamie Blinn declined his nomination for club president.

No nominations have been taken for the 8-bit editor, therefore any member is elegible for this position.

The monthly door prize winners were

selected and neither winner was present to receive their prize. The winners were Nick Castro and Mary Ellen McNulty.

The programming contest winners were announced and congratulated. The winners, Roger Reese and Deane Bolin, each received a $25 gift certificate to HobbyTown.

Peter Killian briefly spoke about Kaplan's Discount Club, which is basically a BBS set up for people to purchase software and hardware at reasonable prices. Kaplan's number is 493-4148. (ED. See Kaplan's ad in last months newsletter)

Peter also demonstrated Mindscape's newest game, Gauntlet, which is the home version of the Atari Arcade game by the same name. Gauntlet is a dungeon type game for 1 or 2 players and the player must fight evil creatures while retrieving keys and other objects scattered about the dungeon to progress to lower levels. The graphics in this game are excellent and although game play tends to slow down when the screen is full of creatures, the game is addictive and fun.

HobbyTown currently has in stock, the new XEP 80 Column board for the 8-bits as well as the SX212 1200/300 baud modem for the 8-bit and ST computers.

EDITORIAL

November Elections Again?

Yes, the club officer elections have arrived once again and now is the time for you to get involved in how YOUR club is run.

How Can You Help?

1. Attend the November meeting and participate in the elections. Also, because the 8-Bit editor position does not have a candidate, there is still an opportunity for anyone to run for this position. Why not become an active member?

2. Help out the club officers.

   a. Submit articles for the newsletter or suggestions for articles.

   b. Inform the club librarians of new public domain programs that could be included in our library, or suggest ways to improve our library.

   c. Offer solutions or suggestions for making the meetings more enjoyable and the club more beneficial for its members.

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If all goes well this should be the last issue of this newsletter with myself as the editor. Yes, I said the same thing last year and ended up doing the newsletter for another year because no one else wanted to, but I feel that after two years as the editor I need a change of jobs.

Although I may not put out each issue, I am sure that I will contribute to the output of the newsletter in some capacity.

While on the topic of the newsletter, I believe that this last year has produced some of our best issues of the newsletter ever. Not only did we have a variety of 8-Bit and ST articles, but these articles were written by our own club members and not members of other clubs. I hope this trend continues in future issues and that more club members submit articles.

Thanks!

I would like to thank all the people who have contibuted their time and thoughts to this newsletter over the past year, for without their contributions this newsletter would not have continued.

The contributors were:

Jamie Blinn, Deane Bolin, Donna Griggs, Peter Killian, Steven Ourada, Roger Reese, Denny Rourke, and Axel Ricker.

A special thanks also needs to be given to Dave Chiquelin and his BBS Atari-O for all the downloaded articles used in this newsletter. Dave has maintained an excellent board with numerous downloads and has served the Omaha area very well. Thanks Dave.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

NOVEMBER MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATIONS:

Jamie Blinn, Glen Flint, Beverly Hagen, Bruce Harvey, Theodore V. Henderson, and Dolly Heyden

NEW MEMBERS:

Lee Estrada, Greg Cordes, M. Louise Hamilton, Ken Geison and Bill Zimmerman

Welcome to the CLUB!

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O-ACE's membership is $18.00 per year. Members should note that their membership expiration date is in the upper right hand corner of their mailing label.

THIS 'N THAT
By Donna Griggs

Micro League Sports Association's new *MICROLEAGUE BASEBALL II* for the ST contains many new elements not included in its predecessor such as stadium dimensions and factors, injuries, arguments with the umpire, rain delays, pitcher stamina and tiring factors, and a stat compiler. I have not seen the game yet but I hear it is a must for the serious computer sportster!

G.U.E., the university setting of Infocom's new interactive adventure, *THE LURKING HORROR*, was modeled after M.I.T., according to Infocom sources. In fact, the company was started by M.I.T. grads, and Dave Lebling, the author of the game, attended the university and worked at its Laboratory for Computer Science. This game is out for both the ST and the 8-bit.

ST owners can get behind the wheel of one of the world's top sports cars. They can climb into a Ferrari Testarosa, a Lamborghini Countach, or a Lotus Esprit Turbo with Accolade's *TEST DRIVER* a driving simulation where you zip through different sections of a highway while avoiding slower traffic and the highway patrol.

Sierra On-Line has a new police adventure, *POLICE QUEST - SEARCH FOR THE DEATH ANGEL*, which is fashioned after the real life experiences of Jim Walls, a former California Highway Patrol detective. Officer Walls, who designed the game, was stationed in the small town of Grapevine, right along the section of Highway 5 dubbed "The Grapevine" (a lone stretch through the sleepy Mohave Desert where just about everyone's car overheats). There, among many other things, he broke up a local drug trafficking ring. It was also there that a gunman plugged Walls four times in the stomach, forcing him into retirement. (Incidentally, the gunman went to jail.) After some prompting from his wife, Walls approached Sierra with the idea for a game based on his drug busts in Grapevine. The company loved the idea and there should have been a happy ending. But the gunman escaped from jail and the veteran policeman and his family had to go underground while he designed the game. The bad guy was renabbed and Walls resurfaced to finish work on Police Quest. For a first project, it is a good game and is available for the ST and IBM for $50.

Good news for ST football lovers. An enhanced version of *GRIDIRON!* has been released. *GRIDIRON 1.2* by Electronic Arts is filled with new features such as full touchdown sequences, beginning and ending screens, five levels, and an improved playbook. It also costs $50.

Mindscape and Atari Games Corp. have entered an agreement allowing Mindscape to publish computer versions of Atari coin-operated video arcade games. The first off the line is *GAUNTLET*, expected soon are *PAPERBOY, ROAD RUNNER, ROAD BLASTERS, GAUNTLET II*, and *720*.

Infocom should have three new adventures out in time for Christmas: *PLUNDERED HEARTS*, a seventeenth century journey that sets you on a schooner bound for the West Indies. This innocent journey turns into a dangerous adventure. *NORD AND BERT COULDN'T MAKE HEAD OR TAIL OF IT* is their first collection of short stories. Each of the eight stories involves a different type of wordplay. You really can make a mountain out of a molehill, and you'll need to shake a tower before you can take a shower. *BEYOND ZORK*, a new Brian Moriarty project, set in the universe of Zork, is a blend of interactive games.

Strategic Simulations, Inc. and TSR, Inc. (creators of the classic advanced Dungeons & Dragons fantasy role-plaing game) shook hands on a five-year licensing agreement that gives SSI the rights to produce and market a product line series of games based on Dungeons & Dragons. SSI plans to release at least 10 different role-playing and several action games for the ST as well as the Amiga, Apple, IBM, and C64. They hope to start bringing these out in early spring.

Next month I will talk about games that have been converted from other machines to the Atari.
Until then, HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

The Atari Mega ST4

A Preliminary Hands On Report
Inside and Out

by Jwahar R. Bammi and Andy Nicola

Since its announcement last January, the Mega ST4 computer has been somewhat of an awesome myth among Atari enthusiasts, especially those of us who live within the continental U.S. At the same time we all have had time to reflect on what might be done with such power (4 Megs of RAM on-board!) and what exactly are the capabilities and limits of this machine. This report will attempt to present a first hand overview from a users perspective of the machine along with some definitions and insights.

The unit arrived nicely bundled in a retail store pack, not unlike the same carton which packaged the 1040ST. The Mega unit is noticably heavier though. The new users manual is extremely well laid out compared to previous attempts by Atari, and along with the BASIC Language disk was an advanced programmers reference guide only. Is Atari trying to tell us something here?

The machine itself consists of basically 3 pieces; the CPU box itself, the keyboard and the connecting cable. Assembling the unit took only a minute and only a monitor and external drive (if needed) required any thought for placement. Placing the monitor on top of the CPU box is acceptable and either color or monochrome are easily accommodated.

This unit originally came without the blitter chip, but since then the blitter has arrived and been installed. More on this later.

A First Look Outside

The first thing one notices about the CPU box is that a small hook-like extension protrudes from one of the rear casing vents on the top near the rear of the unit. Opening this small door reveals a compartment for 2 AA batteries which will maintain time for the systems built-in clock.

Operating the unit without these batteries is okay, but your files will not be accurately updated with the correct time and date stamp. Next comes the insertion and placement of the mouse. Under the keyboard, behind the F5 key there is a left-to-right horizontal configuration for placing the mouse out to the right, and a joystick out the left. The attached wires are to be buried in a neatly placed groove under the keyboard, serving a two-fold purpose: keeping the desktop much neater than before and taking up some of that awful slack.

Placement of the CPU box and proximity of the detachable keyboard will be a prime consideration for many people. Atarians are not used to this kind of special treatment unless they are already spoiled by another environment. With this in mind, it must be noted that the footprint of the machine is about equal to 2 1040ST's, back-to-front, but only the keyboard itself is as wide.

The CPU box comes with an Atari standard double-sided drive built-in. Access to the drive is from the front of the unit and if the unit is directly in front of you, this can take some getting used to. The keyboard connecting cable plugs into the left side of the CPU box a little more than half way back, in a recess in the case where the cartridge slot is also located. All other standard ST plug-ins are along the rear of the casing and they seem to be better organized for peripheral placement than on previous units.

The keyboard may be placed on the desktop in one of two configurations. Out of the box it lays flat and may be preferred by some. For those of us who are a little lazy in our reach, there are 2 flip-up extension flaps which raise the rear of the keyboard 5/8". The keys themselves have a much firmer feel on the downstroke and is probably the best 'feeling' keyboard Atari has ever produced, just inching past the feel of my old 1200XL! The layout of the keys is the same as previous ST units including the function keys and numeric keypad. The 45 degree to the right grooves in the casing have been replaced with hash marks equally spaced the same width as the function keys. For those individuals

who like to have the keyboard in their lap, never fear; the connecting cable is of sufficient length and strength to accommodate you comfortably. Don't get too laid back, though, or you will be picking up your mouse off the floor. After the first or second time you ought to be cured.

A First Look Inside

Opening the unit for the first time was very exhilarating as I could not wait to see all the goodies we all had heard about for so long. After removing the casing and the shield, and carefully detaching the wires to the clock batteries, there it was! An almost perfectly square motherboard which had been completely redesigned for efficiency. All the components looked well placed and natural. The photographs of this board that have previously been published in various magazines do not do it justice, nor do they reveal to the casual or expert observer some of the hidden hardware enhancements Atari didn't tell anyone about!

First off, there are holes drilled in various places on the motherboard which indicate that another drive could easily be fitted into the case (there is plenty of room under the shield). Second, there is a 22-pin bus that is hard wired to the DMA port on the motherboard that Atari didn't even know existed until they received the units from the final assembly point. What could one do with such a bus you might ask? Well, for starters, how about the direct connect of other DMA devices, such as hard drives and laser printers, without the need for daisy-chaining. At the junction on the board where the power supply plugs in, there is an extra plug-in for another powered unit!? What could possibly go here? The first thought that came to my mind was (a drum roll, please) a hard card!! There is plenty of room under the shield, the 22-pin bus is open, and a source of power...so, a low voltage, single-slot, half-height 20Meg or 40Meg hard card would be ideal!! The promised expansion bus is present in all its glory, and there is a removable cutout in the back of the CPU box casing for annexing external devices. Inside the right rear of the case is a small

fan. It is extremely quiet and pulls air in through small vents on the top right of the case above the disk drive. This is the first time a fan has appeared in an Atari computer. The new TOS ROMS are, of course, included and will be discussed shortly. 1 Meg RAM chips are standard in this unit and all other components are the same as previous models with the exception of the blitter and clock chips.

The blitter chip was a little tricky to install. Apparently Atari knew that some units would be shipped without blitters, but the original blueprint of the motherboard does not call for this omission. Two pads (jumpers) on the motherboard had to be removed before the blitter could be installed. It is necessary to insure that all solder is removed and a zero continuity check be made across these pads before powering up the unit. [Authors Note: This information is given only for the purposes of those individuals who received similar units, developers, etc. The standard release production models that will be at your Atari dealer will not require the buyer/end-user to perform this work.]

On The Surface

Many features of the GEM desktop are the same, but some have been enhanced tremendously by the new TOS ROMS. Specifically, a dialog box now appears to ask for confirmation of saving the desktop configuration with a default of 'YES'. All double clicking on files other than executables will default to the 'SHOW' function and spurious problems that sometimes occur with disk reads default to 'RETRY'. Foreign language documents with international characters now allow all characters to be viewed fully on the screen.

Open windows with more than a window full of files now allow smooth scrolling on the arrow pointers or the slider bars just by holding down the left mouse button. Changing the names of icons now allows for lower case letters to be used rather than being forced into an upper case mode. Under the OPTIONS drop down window there is an extra slot for acknowledgement of the blitter. A check mark indicates that the blitter is in an access mode and this is

the default configuration. Clicking on this will turn the blitter off as indicated by the missing check mark.

Launching applications is much quicker then before and TOS text scrolling is greatly enhanced. A much larger buffer space is utilized for the copying of files which reduces the number of disk swaps for floppy only users. In fact, most programs manipulated during file management will transfer in one pass. This has to be a boon to single disk drive owners.

The overall performance of the unit was more than expected, but there were a few minor quirks. The placement of the power switch near the right rear of the CPU box made it extremely difficult for a right-handed user to get at without actually standing and reaching for it. Being right-handed, I cannot imagine the contortions a left-handed person might go through. The same limitation exists for the mouse placement. If a left-handed user runs the mouse cord under the keyboard for easy access, he must also elevate the keyboard so that it doesn't 'roll' on the desktop. These are minor considerations, but considerations just the same.

A Second Look Outside

We found the aesthetics of the system as a whole much more pleasing than anything previously from Atari and concurred that the styling and comfort were to become major considerations for many buyers. There is a consistency here that says, 'First look at me, then watch me fly.'

Decisions...Decisions...

Reaction of authors and of associates was that Atari gets full marks for the engineering and packaging of the product, but very low marks as far as any new innovation is concerned. Some of us are in a dilemma whether to upgrade our existing 520/1040 ST's using one of the many memory upgrade boards available, along with a new set of ROMS, essentially bringing the machine up to the technical level of the MEGA ST's, or to go for the real thing. It finally boils down to a matter of personal choice. One of the authors decided it was worth it the other did not.

A Message to Atari.

What Atari's plans are for the expansion bus is anybodys guess. It is felt that third party developers will be on their own here and probably not without some cost. The new generation of 32 bit personal computers are just beginning to appear in the marketplace. With a little effort GEMDOS can be cleaned up to make it compatible with the 68020 processor. Atari's "POWER WITHOUT THE PRICE" philosophy along with a 68020 based MEGA ST would certainly satisfy the craving of this 'techno-junkie'.

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Jwahar R. Bammi is a graduate student research assistant in the Computer Engineering and Science department at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Andy Nicola, who is the original compiler of the ST Software list and author of the new ST Software Catalog from Atari, donated his MEGA ST4 computer for this report.

ATARI CORP. TO LAUNCH CD-ROM

LONDON -- One product launch at this year's Personal Computer World Show here perhaps got less attention than it deserved -- it was Atari Corp.'s CD-ROM system. As far back as 1985, Atari was making noises about employing the colossal storage capabilities of CD-ROMs for archive data retrieval. In that year, however, the audio aspect of compact disks was in its infancy (CDs being first unveiled by Philips and Sony in 1983), so Atari made a public statement that when technology prices fell, it would release a CD-ROM system for its machines. The company apparently feels the time has come.

To be shipped by Christmas, the Atari CD-ROM system will sell in the UK for about $650 and is capable of up to 400 meg of data storage on a single compact disc. In line with the unofficial CD-ROM standard, the Atari system will work to a 350-meg standard on a disc, and also will be capable of playing existing audio compact discs. As an added bonus, the system also will be capable of playing up to one hour of real-time video, although it remains to be seen how much video software actually becomes available on the format.

Atari's announcement may be a challenge to Microsoft Corp., which earlier this month announced shipment of its first CD ROM application, Bookshelf, a collection of 10 major reference works on a single CD ROM disk
---Ben Knox

This month's column will be a bit tamer than last time.   Instead of an editorial comment, I return to commenting on newly observed programs.   The programs are not always the newest items on the market, but it is the first time your commentator has really worked with them (read that as I now own a copy instead of just seeing it in ads or on someone else's machine).   The programs in the barrel for November are two disk utility packages:

Holmes & Duckworth Tool Box
Hippo Disk Utilities

The TOOL BOX

As many of you probably already know, this is NOT a new product. In fact, Holmes & Duckworth have already gone out of business (so I have been repeatedly told). Why then have I bought it? Two reasons: (1) it did something I needed and (2) the price was right.

Let me take the price first. I got it for a substantial discount from our friendly neighborhood Atari dealer. If you have not been in there lately, go in and browse. They have a lot of bargains if you take the time to look for them and are willing to take a chance on some of them.

The particular problem I had was an inadvertently deleted file that I absolutely had to have. I needed it because I had not followed my own advice and did not have a backup. The best way to avoid this problem, of course, is to ALWAYS MAKE A BACKUP of any important file (just about everything you do may be important). Unfortunately, that didn't help me after the fact when Murphy's law had already caught me. Ironically, I was doing then exactly what I am doing now -- writing an article for a newsletter. In fact, I was editing the whole newsletter (I was up to 6 legal sized pages). I had not only lost my work, I had lost that done by more than 10 other writers.

The bottom line was that I could not recover the file as I had hoped. I found that the problem was a little more complex than a simply deleted file. Somehow, the last my file was saved, the computer thought there was nothing there to save (i.e. zero bytes long). I proceeded to

look at each sector and found that there were pieces of my work scattered about on the disk. I needed to use a sector editor to put the pieces back together. Unfortunately, I could not easily figure out how to use the one in the tool box to do the job. Instead, I reverted to an older program I already had: Hippo Disk Utilities.

HIPPO DISK UTILITIES

This program also does fancy things with the disk, such as recover deleted files. I did not have a lot of confidence in the program, though. I had used it before and had some trouble with it. I had already tried to recover my lost file with it and got back the cryptic message that the file could not be recovered. I struggled with the program for a while and began to think I would have to start over from scratch.

After I could not recover the program with the Tool Box (see above), I decided to try a different approach. I tried my ideas first with the Tool Box and could not figure out how to get it to do the job. I then remembered a feature in the Hippo package that might help.

Hippo was able to put pieces of the disk into a "scrap" area and then save whatever was in that "scrap" to another disk file. I proceeded to step through my disk, one sector at a time until I found text I remembered as coming from my missing file. Once I found something, I marked the beginning of what I found and kept going until I ran into "gibberish" again. I then marked the end of what I had found and moved it to the "scrap" area. I have two disk drives and proceeded to save the scrap area to a file on my second drive.

Pretty soon, I had about 12 separate pieces of my original work. I then quit the utility program and ran the word processor I had typed everything into (ST Writer). I merged in all of the pieces and proceeded to move those pieces around until I soon had everything back again in the same order I had before. I did have to type in about 2 - 3 lines that I did not find on the disk, but I saved about 4

hours worth of work altogether by the time I was done.

PARTING COMMENTS ON BOTH PROGRAMS

How would I rate the two programs? First of all, I should point out that neither should be used by a novice. Such programs are by definition dangerous to use if you don't have a good idea about what they can do. Both can scramble a disk even further than it already is. They can also take a disk that is usable and make it unusable. I would therefore urge caution.

There are two more points of comparison between the two programs. Hippo's product is GEM-based, while the Tool Box is not. This is a plus for Hippo. Hippo loses major points for me though, because I could not easily back it up (the program is copy protected). I could easily back up the Tool Box disk, though.

On the whole, I would rate the Hippo product a little bit higher. Even though I did not have a lot of confidence in it at first, it came through when I needed it. It took me a while to figure out how to get it recover my file, but in the end, it worked.

NEXT MONTH

In the future, I plan to talk about the following programs:
    SwiftCalc ST (a return visit)
    PrintMaster Plus
    and (possibly) The Kermit and Remote
Control Accessory (for FLASH)

I also want to remind my readers that I welcome comments and questions on what I have written. If you disagree with me, want to talk on the subject, or would like to see something different -- please write or call (use the return address on the newsletter or my number listed on the cover page).

PROGRAMMING WITH DBMAN
by Peter R. Killian

This month will be the first in a series on how to get dBMAN to do the work you would like it to. dBMAN is a very versatile product produced by VersaSoft and now sold through Atari as well. In fact, many at Atari now consider it the standard against which all others should be compared. I have found it easier to program in than almost anything else I have used.

Some of the techniques I will discuss apply to many different languages besides dBMAN, so even if you do not have it, you may find some of words useful. But enough preliminaries, let's get down to a practical application. In this column, I intend to share with you the process I go through as I plan and write a program to keep track of your checkbook, your credit cards, loans, savings, and help you to plan and stick to a budget that includes all of them. The result should even be adjustable to allow you to open new accounts and close old ones as your situation changes.

Since this exercise is to be a learning experience as well, I plan to use some of the special features of the dBMAN system, including mouse and (possibly) pull-down menus. Since I have not written the program, I expect to suggestions and may even be able to incorporate some of them into the final product.

The first thing I do when I want to write a program is take some time to think about it. This may seem rather elementary, but I find it indispensible so I do not commit myself too early to a design that is restrictive. The quicker I sit down at my keyboard, the more trouble I am likely to have later.

After letting it gel for at least overnight, I get out a stack of paper and start to write down what I want the program to do. I then start to figure the steps needed and the order they will have to be done in. I don't worry at first about the order, but just write down my ideas as they occur to me.

After I write this preliminary "stuff" down, I then try to write it out as a paragraph in plain English. I can then show it to others and ask their opinion. Often they give me some very useful suggestions or point out place where I might get into trouble.

Next month, we will look at my plain English explanation of what I want to program to do. I will also include the code for the core program.

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NEXT MEETING

November 11, 1987 - 7 pm
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